Ain't I a Woman?

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In our last issue we printed an article called "Women Loving Women," which consisted of questions by straight women to gay women at a workshop on gay experience. At the end of the article we listed three questions not dealt with in the article that were more theoretical than the others, and said we'd deal with them another time. The questions were: How do straight women oppress gay women? Is being gay a prerequisite for being considered a serious, really committed revolutionary WL woman? What is the difference between being bisexual and being gay? How does that difference read politically? We have discussed the questions within the collective as well as with other women we know. Some of us feel reluctant now to spend a lot of energy on them. Also, as several of the articles below indicate, we feel justified in questioning their importance to us. The first article following is a response by a "bisexual" woman to the original question, and her feelings about the label. We felt it was important to print her response. The other articles are statements by a few members of the AIAW collective reflecting their personal feelings about the "gay/bisexual/straight" issue.

"sexual politics"

When I was asked to write something for the paper about being a bisexual woman in response to a question in the last issue, I was put on the defensive right away. The question read, "What is the difference between being bisexual and being gay? How does that difference read politically?"

That question pissed me off because it divides women up into two categories - bisexual and gay - which are simply not valid in political terms. I know that most gay women define bisexual as "male-oriented" and gay as "woman-oriented". But the issue is not whether a woman is bisexual or gay but whether she is male-identified or woman-identified - whether the people she relies on, uses her energies towards, and mainly relates to are men or women.

There are certainly a lot of bisexual women around who are woman-identified and these women must be judged by their actions not by a word that has no meaning other than she relates to men as well as women. I can very easily see how a "bisexual-male-oriented" definition fits a lot of bisexual women (judged by their actions) but not all women who have labels attached to them (often so they can be set aside so they won't have to be dealt with) fall into neat little categories.

I have experienced emotional pain because exclusively gay women have pushed me aside as not to be dealt with because I am "bisexual" and therefore not really interested in women. And I am "bisexual" in the strictest sense of the word - I live with two men and a woman. I don't want to get involved in a long statement about how I live now - but I related to the two men before I was gay and they are decent (not perfect) men who are interested in changing. I am not interested in relating to any other men now or ever - it is not worth the energy to get to know a man well enough to have a relationship with him. I can direct those energies toward loving women. It is hard to believe, because most men are so horrible, that it isn't a struggle to live with these men. When they don't act right they are come down on by myself and the woman I live with. They know that if they don't change we will not struggle with them and they will have to leave. If these men become a hassle so that they demand most of my energies in order to deal with them it will simply not be worth it. I can direct those energies to women instead of spending my time in a complete energy drain dealing with men. But it is not like that now.

The fact is that I am woman-identified and I really dislike being called "bisexual" (except in a very strict sense - I do relate to two men) - in other words if the two men I live with left I wouldn't cry and run out and find other men to replace them. Loving women means a lot more to me.

On a personal level my response to you would be mistrust of what you say - that you don't spend much time struggling with the men you live with. I would find it almost impossible to commit myself personally to you or to any bisexual woman because my experience has been that men come first to bisexual women.

I disagree with the other members of the AIAW collective in that I believe bisexuality does make a difference politically. The time you spend struggling with men, in this case the men you live with, could be spent aiming your energies toward women. That is not to say that I would not work politically with you or any bisexual women if the work did not involve heavy personal commitment and trust.

When lesbians first started to "come out" to the women's movement, there was a great deal of discussion about being gay. Straight women were put up against the wall about their homosexism and about their feelings for other women. During this time, alot more women came out, alot of women faced their own homosexism, and gay women found other gay women and began having more support. Also at this time, alot of straight, celibate and bi-sexual women felt pressures to become exclusively gay. I don't think there was anything bad about this period in the women's movement. It was important. But alot of women who were not gay became so defensive about their lives that they either completely left women's communities or they played at being gay when they really weren't. Both of those situations were harmful. Mistakes were made by alot of us. Some gay women pushed too hard and some straight women became too defensive. There are situations where people should be forced to deal with the ways they oppress others. As long as people have stopped oppressing other people (as much as that is possible at this time) they can't be forced to be something they aren't. That is potentially bad for both gay people and straight people.

I know there may still be times when gay women will want to be with only gay women. There may also be some levels of trust that are greater for some things among gay women. But its also true that women who are not gay can do important, necessary revolutionary work and can be trusted on important levels.

Why....some of my best friends are straight.....

There are three reasons why the questions posed were felt by some of us to lead to unfruitful conclusions. Basically, we recognized that, whatever our personal differences, there is a great political necessity for diverse people to work together. Concentrating on our diversities as individuals, and generalizing philosophies which place value judgements on certain groups over others, easily leads to ideological factionalism. Splits in groups can only be helpful when they free a group of people to be actively effective in ways they were prevented from when working within the original group. But ideological splits within a group that can agree on necessary actions, and carry them out, only weakens the possibilities for externally effective work.

Another danger, particularly in the gay/bisexual/straight division of supposed political committment, is the creation of a phony solidarity based on one's sexual label. This leads to idealism in generalizations such as "All gay women have the same politics" or "Straight or bisexual women can't be trusted." We have made false conclusions of this type in the past. It used to be popular to believe, for instance, that "All gay women are feminists" because of their committment to women (or at least a woman) at the base of their life-style and throughout their day-to-day existence. The naivete of that idea was quickly exposed by experience with gay women who obviously were not feminists. We must work against this dangerous type of idealism for our own security, as well as the necessity for correct thinking and analysis concerning the actual goals and ideologies which hold a group together and allow it to act effectively.

I am a gay woman who, like many others, used to be straight. While I was married I had a deep relationship with a woman for three years. But for some reason I never thought of myself as bisexual; it never occurred to me to integrate the two permanently. I realized it was, for me, an either/or situation that sooner or later I had to decide upon. The dialectic of that decision process is a long story. The fact that I knew I would probably never love another man besides the man I lived with didn't make the choice any more obvious to me for some time. While I was caught up in it, it seemed like a choice simply between two emotions of love that I felt, one for a woman and one for a man. That contributed to the either/or bind that I felt, as well as a tradition of monogamy in all my past relationships. Finally I came to the realization that women were my primary concern, and my lifestyle followed accordingly.

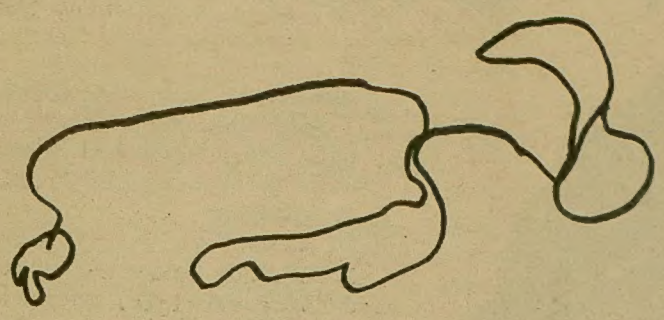
The point I want to make, however, is actually a non-point: there is no way I have, or can, generalize my personal experience into a political statement along these lines. My politics are of course related to my personal life, but that's not the same thing.

There are ways in which I do not trust or want to relate to straight or bi-sexual women, but they have little to do with the dogma of the questions we're responding to. I'm not sure what the prerequisites to being a revolutionary are but I think many straight and bi-sexual women are or will be revolutionaries. What I would like to talk about is the level at which I do exclude them from my life.

Being gay means to me not just loving all women but seeking close and intimate relationships with other gay women like myself. And although I realize that labels can stagnate people - that women who are labeled straight may someday be gay - I find the labels someone uses to identify themselves helpful. It is important to me to know the context in which I can relate to someone - who I can become deeply involved with. It is also important for me to exist as much as possible in a gay subculture. It's my nutrition and must obviously exclude on some levels straight or bi-sexual women. Because I don't want to become involved with anyone on any deep emotional level who is not resolved about their lesbianism I need a space in which to find those women who are like myself. A space to relax in, be dyky in, a space where I can function according to the standards and culture of my own kind. I find it impossible to explain in print what that subculture - the space is like. Only that it is a freedom to be myself with other people like myself.

As far as relating to straight and bi-sexual women - well, there are a million fears. For one thing it is painful to care about someone and not be able to relate to whole portions of their lives. And sometimes I really resent the total integration straight and bi-sexual women can have into a gay culture (our culture) while they have a whole other culture to slip in and out of. I also feel like the qualities I have only make sense, are valued by gay standards and so I feel like so much less of myself pitted against the men in straight and bisexual women's lives.

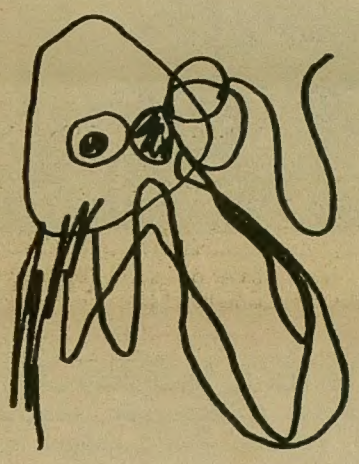
I can't really explain any of this very well although I am pretty sure that gay women will understand. I only hope that straight and bi-sexual women can understand, too, the levels at which I must exclude them from my life and realize that that doesn't mean I don't respect, care about, and want to work with them on other levels.



Dear Nico
I love you. I like you. I'm going to invite you to my birthday. I'm going to send a picture to you. I want to do a poem about T.V. That's it.
Elaine

Piss in your poopey. Poop in your pissy.
A flower that I know. I've been camping.
I paint at daycare...a propeller. Iowa.

Cecilie

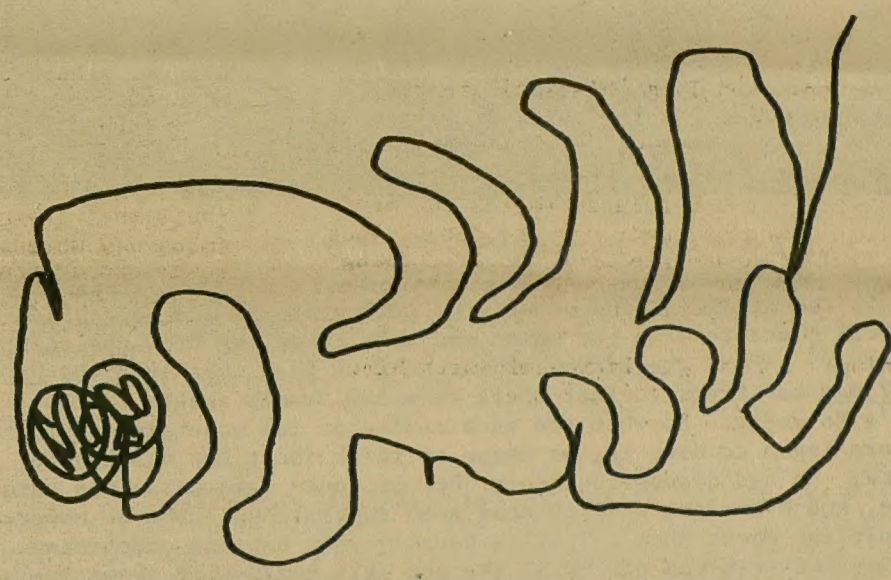


I've been camping. I love your flower. I like to stay overnight at people's house. I've been to the Union. I grabbed six straws. I love you, Christmas Tree. I know how to phone Jayson and Mari and day-care. I love you, glasses. I ring the doorbell. I want to say cuckoo-birds. I love you tongue. Sissy bell. I like cottage cheese. I put my tomato soup in my cottage cheese and mixed it around. I love Jayson. I love you Nico, Duncan. I want to give you a present. The end.
Julia

Nico is a four-year-old female who went to France and left these friends at her daycare center....

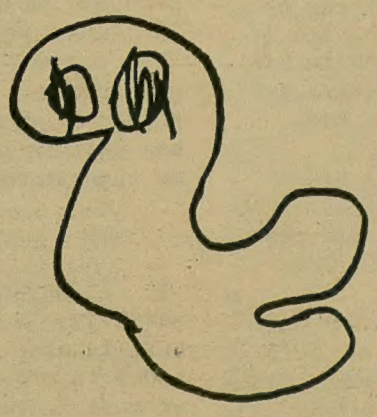
I'm six years old, pissy, poopey. I put tomato soup in my cottage cheese. I love glass. I love Willy. I threw up in the Christmas tree. I pissed and pooped on the Christmas tree. Nico pissed in the ocean. Put on your glasses before you go in the elevator. I pissed in my hair. I drawed a picture of a mouse with a hat on.
Lynelle

I cough in my glasses.
My snot runs up my nose and down my nose.



Nico. Piss. Poopey. Nico, I love you. I tease you. I'm six. I'm all done saying. Bullshit. (My Grandma doesn't . . . feel good and they don't know how long she will live.)
Andrea

kids' letters to NICO



drawings by
GONNI
(NICO)

cameramen took our pictures
I felt myself sliding
into the government files
with my sisters and brothers
to reappear
in an article in Life Magazine
after some future catastrophe
white circles and arrows
indicating those of us being hunted

--from a poem by Fran Winant
in Looking at Women

Last year some of us lived in a women's collective. Iowa City, being in the middle of the country on Interstate 80 made our house a logical place to stay for women who were traveling from one coast to another. About the middle of the year we read that even the New York Times had reported that there were 500 female agents in the Women's Movement. So when the snow melted on the mountains and the visitors began to drop in, we began to think about how vulnerable we were. We had discussions about how we could make ourselves more secure, and even came up with some good suggestions. But we never did anything about them. That is usually what happens concerning security--it gets put off until its too late because it seems insignificant at the time. One essential thing to remember, however, is once you have someone in your midst that you doubt or don't trust, it is almost impossible to deal with the situation. The best way to be secure is to be prepared.

We got ourselves into one of those impossible situations last year and that experience has made us willing to do the tedious work necessary in creating a system that would protect us from getting into that position again. A woman had come to Iowa City for a short time and needed a place to stay. We offered her a spare room in our collective and she stayed for two months. One of us started having suspicions but didn't mention them because she thought they were so outrageous and because she didn't know how they would be received as we hadn't talked very much about security. Finally, we all became suspicious and began talking about what we could do. We discovered that it is almost impossible to protect yourself from someone who is living with you. Things like being gay (which is illegal in most states), or smoking dope or addresses of friends or parents--all these things come out in the routine of a day. They seem insignificant and you may be into nothing that is illegal, but the F.B.I. documents at Media, Pennsylvannia that were lifted and copied show that this is just the type of information the government wants to collect on people who are working for change. It can be used later in either tracking you down if you've broken the law or in busting an acquaintance of yours. A male broke the law in L.A. and within an hour the police had contacted all of his friends and relatives. They knew just where to go for information and knew exactly where he'd be likely to go.

Another thing to consider is that we (or our friends) often feel close or become emotionally involved with people very early in relationships. In situations like this, we often rely on the person closest to the new person to determine the level of trust. That's very dangerous, as well as unfair to the person involved.

In thinking over why nothing is ever done about security, why it's hard to ask routine questions to a visitor, we found we were hesitant because we didn't want to be unfriendly or hurt their feelings. If the Women's Movement is to have a system of security, it has to be agreed upon and practiced. We must be serious about it and operate on rules outside the realm of friendship and hospitality. In light of this we propose the following structure which we will expect when visiting other places and which we will go by when people visit here.

Security

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO WHEN TRAVELING OR MOVING

1. Before your visit, write a letter at least a week in advance. If there is no advance notice, don't expect to be put up by living collectives. Sometimes women's centers have crashing facilities that wouldn't need advance notice, but it would probably be good to write ahead if possible. In the letter you could mention groups you have worked with as references.
2. When you come, expect to be asked some questions. Don't expect a warm welcome until after this business is taken care of. We have talked about this among ourselves and agree that we would not feel anyone or group holding back permission to stay with them until a security check has been done would be being unhospitable. Its simply a necessary precautionary procedure.

THINGS TO DO FOR NEW PEOPLE COMING TO YOUR COMMUNITY

1. Check on their background...people they knew, groups they worked with.
2. If new people who come have been involved with movement things in other cities, contact groups in those places to check on the extent of the person's involvement.
3. Try to know how the people are being supported. Do they have a job, etc.
4. Be careful about what you talk about around new people until you know more about them. Its unnecessary, in most situations to use last names. Don't implicate any more people than necessary.
5. Be careful about leaving lists of people's names and addresses around. One address book carelessly left around could easily be ripped off.
6. The thing about trusting your "vibes" is not a particularly good way of dealing with security. You get feelings about people for legitimate reasons, though, and they should be thought about. When you are in doubt about a person for any reason, do some checking on them. We have to get over thinking it's a heavy thing. It should be considered routine to do security checks by any group that has serious political intentions. I'd rather have someone check on me than to mistrust me for a long period of time.

[redacted]

If anyone else has suggestions to make about what to do about security, let us know. We can only learn from our experiences and our mistakes, so we should share them. We realize that becoming too paranoid about security can make you totally ineffectual, but we must have some structure that we follow to give ourselves some degree of protection.

no more fun and games

We received this article unsigned. If the woman who wrote it wishes to be credited for it, she should contact us and we will gladly do so.

I am a revolutionary. I am a feminist. I don't know if I am a revolutionary feminist or a feminist revolutionary. I think I am a female revolutionary and a feminist. It is arbitrary whether I say first I am a revolutionary or first I am a feminist. The fact is that I am a woman, greatly limited by that fact and conscious of my position as woman, committed to the liberation of all women. There is no possibility for me to be liberated except that all women be liberated, and that means power and control on a political-economic level, not some personal, individual freedom from restrictions or personal fame. Having had nothing, I will not settle for crumbs. The totality of women's historical oppression must be understood, and we must implement our knowledge, restructuring society according to that perspective.

I am, inseparable from being a woman, a human being who has suffered extreme physical and cultural deprivation due to my class position. I am committed to the liberation of people from political-economic subjugation and its side effects -- extremes of wealth and poverty; power and powerlessness; disease; ignorance; terror; weakness; racism, etc. But even had I never personally suffered from my class position I could not imagine struggling for female power out of context of the struggles of all oppressed peoples. I will not be free; women will not be free until all humanity is free. We women should be in the front of the struggle.

Though the struggles of oppressed peoples are intimately connected and inseparable, I do not believe that sexism grew directly from the political-economic subjugation of people in general.

Capitalism is not the root cause of all the ills of the world, and has a relatively short history. We human beings are products of a whole evolutionary development, biological and cultural. In fact looking at its development dialectically the advent of capitalism historically has advanced the power potential of women to begin the struggle for liberation from biological and cultural evolution. Sexism is older than capitalism, and has developed from the biological difference between male and female which itself created a division of labor with value differences. Men produce and fight; women reproduce and support. I do not believe that the reproductive and supportive role of the female has ever in any society been considered as valuable as the productive, and particularly the fighting role of the male. Any exceptions only prove that there is not a predetermined nature to the division. It is not natural law, but an evolutionary development. Of course the necessity and possibility of "separate but equal" made more sense in pre-industrial societies, and women were needed. There was probably little antagonism between male and female. With industrialization and the breakdown of former "natural"patterns, the contradiction between male and female has become antagonistic. Anyone who abstractly denies the antagonism is simply not dealing with reality. Men despise women; women fear and despise men. Maybe it is a "contradiction among the people" in the working class, but it is antagonistic in a descriptive sense.

Whatever the source of the oppression, exploitation and contempt of women, we now have a situation of economic, political and cultural deprivation and a dependency on men and the state and that should be our field of battle, which puts us, objectively, into a revolutionary struggle that is being waged against colonial and class domination of the people in general. This struggle is over a century old as is the parallel, autonomous, conscious struggle of women for female liberation. I do not believe that we have to make of this some grand, logical system of interconnections and cause and effect relations, or decide who is "most oppressed." In our revolutionary movement, due to the class composition of the leadership, ideological development has alternated between anti-intellectualism (pragmatism and mysticism) and idealism (logical systems of thought out of context of social experience or social practice). Let's get out of the rut.

More than is generally true of other movements, the women's movement has had a tendency toward what I will call "science fictionism." The tendency is not absent in some theorists of class struggle: The dream of cybernation making work archaic ("The New Working Class"), for instance. Among women there is the trip of artificial reproduction (not needing a man or even sperm! Wow! what power!) which will "free" women biologically. Whole systems of utopian dreams are created which do not deal whatever with current misery and the means of taking power in order to control the implementation of scientific discovery. Therefore, such images of the future (FUTURE SHOCK) are opportunistic and futuristic and serve, really, to demoralize and depress those who are in the morass of oppression and in struggle, who need means of strength to fight. (I refer to theories such as in Valerie Solanis' SCUM MANIFESTO; S. Firestone, DIALECTICS OF SEX, p. 48 for example; and Ti-Grace Atkinson's views of sexual intercourse and reproduction.) I, too, have contributed to the tendency at times though the tendency has always disturbed me and I have tried to struggle against it with other sisters, and guard against it in my own thinking. Still in rereading what I have written I detect a sin of omission, which could lead to fantasy if not science fiction, rather than struggle.

What I have failed to deal with, and I believe this is true of the movement at every level (among youth theorists, third-world theorists, labor theorists, female liberation theorists), is a general strategy for the taking of power; how to win. Like love scenes in the movies of the 50's, the scene fades out when we get to that question. Again, the class composition of the movement means that there is a tendency toward building a sub-culture: ideological debates in living rooms and movement centers; experimentation with different theories by building elaborate paper organizations supposedly based on "democratic centralism," Marxism-Leninism and Maoism. The dream of building the perfect ideology and the perfect organization to make the revolution, and presumably to govern "after the revolution." The by-product is in-fighting and endless divisions, under the guise of ideological struggle. The most annoying behavior being an incredible arrogance and absolute sureness of a direct pipeline to the fathers of revolution.

That is one side of the sub-culture of the New Left, a growing side. The other side is the "pragmatic," anti-ideology, action-oriented side. The tendency there has been toward a sub-culture of confrontation and demonstration as the style. A by-product is elitism, for behind the scenes are the puppeteers pulling the strings that move the faceless masses of young people. Another tendency is toward mysticism, the "drug culture," which if you want to speak straight is decadence, the casualties of a dying empire. A tragedy of lost lives which is actually analysed by some as progressive. The decadence of the culture can not be ignored, but it must be treated as a problem not as a salvation.

These tendencies exist in the whole movement, but they are more easily neutralized in the third-world struggles, due to the fact that third-world people are involved internationally in revolutionary struggle at this point in history, and the reality of mass struggle transforms the movement to some extent at every point. That is not to say that there are no problems with pragmatism, opportunism, mysticism, idealism and decadence. These are major pitfalls for cadres of the third-world movement, and only intense struggle corrects them.

The women's movement has attacked two major tendencies of the white, male left: abstraction and elitism, which perhaps approximate what Lenin described as "economism" and "adventurism." So there has been a transformation of the left due to the rise of the women's liberation movement. Again I am speaking of the effects on the whites of the left. Given those tendencies, and the nature of the criticisms from women, and the class composition of the women's movement, the resulting dialectic has been a tendency toward pacifism (anti-male violence), small talk groups dealing with the psychological, and a virulent form of anti-leadership,, male or female. The latter was partially in reaction to the puppeteers and partially an outgrowth of middle-class women's programmed competitiveness with each other. These new tendencies have in turn affected the entire white new left, and have been instrumental in practically wiping out the "action oriented" groupings and the puppeteers, leaving the "marxist-Leninist" theorists somewhat morally justified and appearing more together and effective than they actually are.

Though the drop-out rate of women was great from these male left organizations at the beginning and toward the middle of the women's liberation movement in the last three years, political women, now seeking a refuge from what appears to be a dying women's movement, are moving toward these very male-dominated, highly-centralized, heavily ideological, and ineffective organizations: the "pre-party" formations. (I did this myself last fall, joining the REVOLUTIONARY UNION.) These organizations, basically white and middle class in perspective, are entering third-world communities and work-places to test their""proletarian" ideology. This tendency of the new left is similar to the old left. In fact many of the new left leaders in these organizations are sons and daughters of of old leftists.

We are victims of many fads in North America, and the movement has its own brand of fads. For a while "violence" and guns were a fad. Still some people wear buttons with guns (why don't they carry guns?). There was a period of great enthusiasm for Weatherman, and then a sudden desertion of the group and their politics, their model. Among women, there has been the "anti-imperialism" fad (I have met the Vietnamese women and they are me). I believe lesbianism is a fad right now. On the left, "building the party" is still with us. Now there is a strong Asian trend from Maoism to contemplation and body-building through health food and karate. It looks like acupuncture will be the newest trip of the jet-set left.

More and more it seems that women's liberation itself was a fad to many on the left. So as women withdraw from the women's movement in boredom or seeking a new thing, the most reactionary and opportunist sectors of the women's movement (professional women and Trotskyists) spread their professionalism, opportunism, and science fictionism. Though the women's movement may have been experienced by many young, hip women as a fad and used as power against men, and used by new left women as a refuge from struggle and an opportunity for power in the left movement, the majority of women who have been struggling for the past 3 years to create a women's consciousness in the movement and in the society have been honest and serious in their efforts, and are at this point somewhat isolated and not knowing where to go next or what to do. Also thousands of women were politicized and radicalized through the women's liberation movement and are now dangling and demoralized.

Perhaps we may begin to see a second surge of feminism from very serious political women that will not be trippy, fadish, and oppor-

tunist as we have seen in the past. Mixed with the teachings that many of these women have been exposed to by meeting the Cubans, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Chinese, they will want to "go to the people and will go to women in the community and in work places. But still demoralization will set in if there is not an overview, a strategy within which ones work can be measured and analyzed, and true criticism can be made.

There seems to be considerable disagreement as to what constitutes a revolutionary struggle. The whole system's vast brainwashing mechanism (the "combine") has confused people even in the movement. Such truisms as "America is different; we must develop a strategy that fits our circumstances" and "There has never been a successful revolution in a highly industrialized country" are used by many left theorists to actually question whether we will have to make war on the powers that be in order to take power. Some women say that "woman power" will be a revolution in itself and will change everything. But how do we take Power?

It seems to me that no matter how unique America is or whether something has happened before, there are certain principles that are unchangeable in planning an overthrow of a political-economic power class based on violence, profit, and exploitation, no matter how "well-off" the population is. The first principle is that it must be done -- whether it has been done before or not, and no matter how long it takes, or what sacrifices. And the other principle is that the overthrow of a ruling class is by definition a military venture requiring armed struggle, simply because the response you will get from that ruling class will be military in nature. So what we need is not self-defense, but military strategy. We need to develop a military offensive. We need to develop tactics so that we can free political prisoners, for instance, not organize around their "repression," thereby calling for the system to give us the legal right to make a revolution against it.

What is needed is revolutionary military organization which will be primarily military but, through already existing forces in the community, will develop a struggle at every level in the society -- in the schools, colleges, among workers, among women in the communities -- to support the military struggle which will be primary.

The liberal civil rights movement, the student free speech movement, the anti-war movement, the female liberation movement were very successful in mobilizing mass consciousness. They set the stage for revolutionary struggle. But, as James Forman has pointed out, the organizers tend to desert the bases they organize. This is understandable given the lack of revolutionary political experience of those who have led, and given the conscious manipulations by the counter-revolutionary forces of the government and industry in buying off a great many organizers. We must return to our bases and organize militarily, not around the issue of armed struggle, but in fact initiate armed struggle which will speak, and can be organized around on a mass basis.

It seems to me that it is the duty of every conscious revolutionary group to understand and develop military strategy (not just learn martial art or how to shoot or make bombs or any other technical skill alone) while implementing the strategy tactically. Beyond confrontation with the pigs (usually defensively or in a planned confrontation) and scattered acts of sabotage, apparently out of any strategic context, there has been little military practice in North America. And those acts are better termed militant than military. This has been largely a failure in leadership in the movement and the absence of responsible leadership due to assassinations of our most outstanding leaders by counter-revolutionary forces (Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, Clyde Warrior (Ponca), Jonathan Jackson, and many others).

The most powerful force among white young people on the left has been the underground movement of Weatherman. Hopefully, the cadres of Weatherman are not giving up their basic position as a revolutionary military grouping, but are developing even more effectively, and most of all are developing military strategy, not just doing actions. The New Morning statement had a bad influence on the movement, because it released and relaxed whites on the left from emulating Weatherman. What is needed is more Weathermen working under a more developed military strategy. Also military units must organize propaganda so that it reaches the masses of people, not just the movement. Weatherman, coming from SDS, like other factions was hung up on organizing and directing the left itself, rather than developing masses of people, and standing as a model for the rest of the left to emulate.

What holds revolutionaries in North America back from dealing with the military nature of revolution? Again, the class background or perspective of most new leftists from the student movement, anti-war movement, women's movement is middle or even upper class. The tendency then is toward fear or mystification of violence, idealism, debate, sporadic action, fun and games, travel, and eventual demoralization. What is needed is the maternal and proletarian attitude of long-sustained effort, physical sacrifice, fortitude, mental strength, material application of ideas. There is also a strong tendency on the left toward opportunism. The power group in North America offers more opportunities to sell-out, give up, and get off the track than has any government ever. And of course if you don't take the deal, they kill you if you are available.

One of the most insidious tricks the counter-revolutionary forces play is the propaganda of "anti-puritanism." Leftists, like other North Americans, are hung up in ego-trips of all kinds from drugs to orgies to jet-setting to object consumption to life-style. So far the enemy has not had to use guns much against whites on the left because drugs, decadence, travel, things and money have been far more efficient weapons. The "anti-puritanism" in the movement is bullshit. Whatever you call it, revolutionaries have to be extremely disciplined, conscious, controlled, and scientific. We can not be just groovy, relaxed, hip hedonists digging on the idea of revolution -- well-rounded beings, doing what comes naturally. If that is interpreted as coldness and puritanism and inhumanity by some then they are wrong. Still if we have to choose between being cold, whatever that means, or ineffective, I guess being cold wouldn't be the worst thing. What this tendency to life style really is, rather than something new, is a maintenance or the gaining in some cases of the relative freedom of the privileged, as the country singer says, "Having our fun in '71."

The question of security is important when discussing strategy, but it should not be prohibitive. It is one thing to reveal a particular plan of action or a clandestine organization and another to analyze conditions and project a strategy and organization. What I will discuss here will be some principles of armed struggle of small organized political-military units against a superpowerful political-economic system. If some overall principles are developed in our movement, we will not pine for a large centralized organization to begin armed struggle. Such an organization is a fantasy as well as impractical and insecure to the extent it can exist. Rather the existence of many autonomous units working from a set of strategic principles will be the beginning of a democratic centralist organization and the kernel of the new governmental structure. This kind of development is not "anarchic" -- a term most often used to bate. Anarchy is an idealistic, principled opposition to organization, to democratic centralism, to leadership, and to the existence of the state in any form. There is certainly a good deal of anarchy in the movement, but autonomous revolutionary units do not need to be opposed in principle to organization or the state. Quite the contrary, they must be building toward the seizure of power and the establishment of a people's government. In North America, the new political order will surely be drastically different from what we have now in that there will be true people's government and a great de-centralization of political power. For what we have here is a giant empire, not exactly a state. The federal government has become a power unto itself in contradiction to the original concept of the United States. The central government wants to smash all local autonomy. If people in North America often seem anarchistic and provincial, it is no wonder given the abuses of the federal government. But in practice, in the armed struggle, people will learn what is necessary for survival and for winning.

Already there are some such revolutionary units operating and others in the stage of preparation throughout the Americas. Any group that begins preparation and training and action can be assured that they are not alone, and that communications will develop when that is possible.

I speak of the "Americas" as a unit. In the western hemisphere, the "New World," we have a particular situation -- a historical development of four centuries based on conquest, immigration, and slavery. Our struggles in the Americas look very different from those of Africa or Asia or the European continent. We have been liberated from the institution of chattel slavery for just a century in most parts and for less in Cuba and Brazil. The quality and quantity of racism in the Americas, and the resulting nationalism is unique in the world. The natives of the two continents carried on armed struggle for centuries, and are moving again. People came and still come to the Americas from all over the world seeking a better life and even riches.

Though different parts of America were colonized and controlled by different European governments, and language and cultural ties still exist with those European countries, the Americas constitute a truly new world -- a new breed of people; a multi-national world of mixed cultural and language patterns, the Native American and African influence very strongly present despite the systematic destruction of those cultural patterns by the Europeans.

There is a potential, a unique potential for the world and a necessity for America, for the dream of America to come true. Internationalism can be the very basis of our struggle in the Americas. Poor and working class white Americans speak of "saving America." They mean the dream not the reality. They do not know who has crushed this dream. They think perhaps it is the revolutionaries who seem to have no dream. They do not understand the concentration of power and how those in power have transformed the dream of America into personal fortune, commodities, escapes, national parks, and Apollo flights. Of course, the dream of America was created from the beginning by European governments and merchants, particularly English, to imperialize the "new world." It was a trick, propaganda to get people to immigrate. Yet the people who came did believe in the dream and there were valuable goals they came for: plenty for all; freedom for all; equality for all; work for all; freedom of choice; freedom of or from religion; freedom from prison. The people should not be blamed for their own ignorance of what they were being used for and still are.

When this government propaganda says it is trying to spread the "American Way" all over the world, people believe that to mean freedom from dictators; the right to vote; a better way of life. They do not know that oppressed peoples all over the world are struggling against giant corporate landlords, who are European, North American, Japanese, etc. That these people are not "hating" America, but American imperialism. They do not know that their own "prosperity" is at the cost of millions of lives.

As long as North Americans, particularly white working people, identify the US government and its economic system, "free enterprise," as the legitimate bearer of the American dream, they will not fight the system that exists here. They won't even fight when it affects them directly, like their sons dying in imperialist wars. And those sons will keep going to war, even against us, unless they understand. Because they have a dream and they believe, want to believe it is being fulfilled. They will die for that dream. Only new ideals will replace the old, not any appeals to the pocketbook alone. As revolutionaries in this country, we have not trusted or loved the people. Our actions and words have been evasive, cowardly, abstract, and manipulative on the whole. We have had no dream.

It is understandable why that has been so, but let us begin the transformation of ourselves and the revolutionary struggle. Let us begin the attack upon the imperialists, and not waste our energy on local or even state pigs. We must attack the imperialist corporations at the point of production. We must avoid attacking public or government institutions or small businesses, but attack what is behind it all. We must develop a movement that will be the legitimate bearer of the American dream. We need to stop making merely symbolic acts "against the empire," and begin actually cutting into its real power through attacks on its ability to produce. We need to terrorize the ruling class, not the politicians, but the big boys -- those grey, faceless men whose names we may know, but whose faces are unfamiliar because they put their automated lackeys like Nixon in the limelight so he will be hated, and if he gets out of line they will kill him like the Kennedys. Let's put them in the limelight, turn the spotlight on them.

We need to free our revolutionaries in prisons by direct action by kidnapping a big boy for ransom or assault. We need to serve the people by making food and shelter and medicine available as the services begin breaking down. We must get drugs out of our communities, and expose the systematic drugging of the North American people by the powers that be. We must organize the communities for survival, AS WE CARRY ON THE ARMED STRUGGLE, not before we begin.

In building a military strategy, we need to think along the lines of guerilla warfare though we must keep in mind that the basic principle of guerilla warfare is to develop a strategy and tactics based upon the conditions in a particular country. So no specific strategy that has been developed can be lifted and applied. We must search out principles and apply them to existing conditions, considering all factors, including historical development. We must also develop a strategy which is flexible, because flexibility is the key to wearing down the enemy, and remaining intact. The enemy's forces are mechanical and bureaucratically controlled.

We must avoid our usual cause and effect way of thinking about things, not expecting immediate results of a dramatic nature. Revolutionary armed struggle is a science. If you follow certain principles certain results will occur, but not in cause and effect fashion. We must abandon our present time scale. Revolutionary struggle has no time scale, though it is at all stages ARMED and military in nature. It must be carried on by any means necessary; won as fast as possible; fought as long as necessary (the Vietnamese say: "We will fight from one generation to the next"). We cannot look for immediate rewards, instant success, or dramatic victories. Nor can we expect excitement and adventure. Most of the work is dull, monotonous, exhausting, nerve-wracking, unrewarded, and even unproductive much of the time since we make many errors because we are learning from scratch.

If you have worked in a factory, been in the armed forces, done construction work, worked on a farm, been a truck driver, done waitressing, been in jail, done clerical work, been a housewife and mother without help, you will have some preparation in tolerance, for the kind of work you will do in the armed struggle. It is not like school or professional work or lovely movement subculture. People who are accustomed to the easy life will have a difficult time adjusting to the routine and discipline. What is most difficult for anyone is the necessity to be creative and think all the time, and not expect orders from above, there being no above. Only practice brings on the skill of creativity and it is slow in coming and hard to maintain.

Your group will want to develop a very simple, very attainable program of action that fits your potential resources, and not set out to bring the empire down all by yourselves. You should see your group as contributing to the whole of the armed struggle, not as the core or even the little motor (Debray) that starts the big motor. There will have to be many little motors. Yours is just one. Your group will be a "cog in the wheel." Such an attitude does not lend itself to revolutionary adventurism. But your serious, sustained activity and development is what will bring trust from the people and their support and eventual participation. At first, you can only ask, as Marighelli put it, that the people will not OPPOSE the revolutionaries. Do not expect support at first, or even less some sort of uprising of the people. The people have been lied to many times and have a lot at stake; they are rightly suspicious and are not going to put themselves on the line for some nuts out for some fun and games, revolution for the hell of it. It will take a lot to overcome that image of revolution in this country, and it will take a while for people to know you are serious.

Remember that all worthwhile things, life itself, begin very small and develop slowly. No matter how discouraging, how hopeless your situation may seem, do not give up the basic understanding that armed struggle must be built as the basis of our movement and figure out how to work better. Do not question the laws of revolution, only the tactics. Armed struggle as the road to liberation is a law, not an idea. It won't come easy and it won't be fun.

The technical aspects of preparation may seem vast and overwhelming at first. You shouldn't try to do everything or more than you can handle. Keep it as simple and effective as possible. Don't think you have to have machine guns and dynamite to begin. And always remember the safety of the people.

Who am I speaking to when I say we should form military units? Should everyone do this? I don't think we have to worry about everyone rushing to form armed units. What we have to worry about is to get enough people doing it, in the beginning when the way is not clear. Also not everyone should do the same thing. Some people in the movement are in good positions to work openly. That does not mean they can't live double lives and do support work for an armed group. Every movement person should be available to at least do support work if called upon by an armed group. What I am calling for here is for the formation of groups whose full occupation would be to operate as armed units furthering the armed struggle systematically with a strategy in formulation. The members would probably also work on jobs, be "housewives," etc., but under false identities, not seeing old friends and family. They would be "underground." (It would be unlikely that anyone except someone very well known and identifiable and sought after by the law would ever have to "hide out.") They would probably have to be in a different place from where they did their movement work. Any revolutionary who has the choice of a trial or prison or going underground in this way should seriously consider going underground IN THIS COUNTRY with a small group to carry on armed struggle.

In the movement, there is an aura of romaniticism and mystery around armed struggle, probably because there has been so little of it by revolutionaries in this country present or past. The myth of "underground" is not easily dispelled. Serious revolutionaries are actually often "turned off" of developing the armed struggle because they have been admonished by their left leadership to avoid "separating" themselves from the people. They have been warned against "adventurism" and "anarchy" and "elitism." They are told to be patient, that the people aren't ready, conditions are not right. It is often this same left leadership who promotes a strategy of mass demonstrations and strikes and rallies and survival programs divorced from armed struggle or relating only to struggle in another country. They believe we must have the people with us, or we will be picked off like sitting ducks. This could be called "Hiding behind the skirts of the people" or "Leading the sheep to slaughter." A milder form of organizing is around "political prisoners" such as Angela Davis. Instead of organizing SUPPORT for Jonathan Jackson's ACTION, the organizers hush the issue and orgainize around what is, they suppose, easier to swallow -- Angela's legal right to buy guns for revolutionaries. Do they think people are stupid? They may be ignorant, but they are not stupid. Certainly organizing could be done around Angela's moral right to buy guns for Jonathan, but only if it were clear how far out and right Johathan's action was, and how wrong the system is, to justify legal action. You can't manipulate people into being revolutionaries, or supporting revolutionaries.

There is plenty of support for revolutionary martyrdom, but little for the revolutionary deed. As the RAINBOW PEOPLE (American Indian group) say: We have had enough losers; what we need are some winners. This is another principle of the guerrilla: to survive and grow. The stress is not on personal survival, for one must be willing to take chances and die. But we don't need martyr types; only those who would "rather die on their feet than live on their knees" (Zapata) can be revolutionaries -- not those who have nothing to live for or want a cause to die for. Survival of the fighting unit and its growth; taking the offensive; developing and sticking in an area; wearing down the enemy; that is winning. Being on the offensive is crucial -- always in attack, not defense position, avoiding confrontation or self-defense whenever possible. No heroics, but rather sneaking, nighttime or daylight, clandestine movements, driving the enemy crazy, because he does not know where you will appear, even who you are.

Everything you do will require meticulous planning and thought. Nothing should be done spontaneously unless it is an emergency. Each action should be accompanied by demands, and your message should get to masses of people, not just the movement. That will not happen automatically even if you were to blow up the Pentagon. Your actions and programs should be designed to expose the ruling class and the corporate structure. Careful research into the area will be necessary so that you can decide what to do and so you can give information to the people. It is not enough to say someone is a pig imperialist who kills babies in Viet Nam. That's your word against theirs. You have to prove your case. The people are brainwashed. You must be an advocate, a lawyer for the revolution. Before the people can or should judge and support revolutionary action they must accept its legitimacy, not its legality.

It is obvious that I am taking for granted the vanguard role of these military action groups. As long as these groups are MILITARY in nature, and to survive they must gain the support of the people, I can not see how they can become "elitist" or separated from the people. If they do they die. When it comes to survival, very real changes occur very rapidly in people.

As for the internal structuring of the group, it is small enough and can be intimate enough for there to be collective decision making and a true equalitarianism. Criticism and self-criticism, in this setting, are not artifices or power tools. Collective leadership is not just a principle or a matter of justness; it is a reality and a necessity. These are tools of personal and group survival. When other groups form in the area, there will develop some communications between groups for more effective programming. Then, for the purposes of security, only one or two people from each group should know each other, and these would constitute a permanent co-ordinating group. These trusted individuals would be selected collectively for their abilities and experience and should not be regarded as "privileged." If they cannot handle the work or are irresponsible they should be replaced but only if necessary. Consistency in matters of security could mean life or death for the movement in an area.

Also, only one or two people in a group should have contact with the person or persons or network that is above ground, and the people above ground should not know who the people in the action group are, or how many or any details of plans or where they live. Good manners and social-type trust should be abandoned in this situation.

continued next page...

Where should these revolutionary action groups operate? We should develop an overall military strategy for revolution in this country based on what is already happening and the vulnerable points of the enemy. But we don't have to have an agreed strategy to begin. We need experience in armed struggle and an experimental outlook (scientific). Groups should be willing to choose an area that is unfamiliar perhaps, go there "underground" under false identities, not all living together in a group, of course, but rather in pairs probably, everyone meeting together in a secure place as often as is necessary.

I speak of going to another area, because there are a great many movement people in areas that are not key areas tactically, and in universities, etc. Try to figure out where the enemy is weakest. Armed struggle does not mean militant actions in support of organizing or strikes -- it's just not guerrilla warfare. Armed struggle means building a functional guerrilla with a strategy, and it is primary, not supportive. Demonstrations and strikes should be formed around support for the guerrilla and its demands.

Some very important books to read to work on strategy: A general history of North America -- Leo Huberman's WE THE PEOPLE (Monthly-Review Press) is good; Dee Brown's BURY MY HEART AT WOUNDED KNEE, which describes the armed struggle of the Indians of the South-West and North-West. The writings of James Forman are very important (Black Star Pbl., Detroit); Lundburgh's RICH AND THE SUPER-RICH and Domhoff's WHO RULES AMERICA are useful; and the MINIMAN-UAL of Marighelli. These books, in addition to studying maps of the Western Hemisphere, are helpful in formulating a military strategy suited to this country. They are not put forward as constituting a political ideology or already formed strategy. All the writings of the revolutionaries should be studied in developing ideology.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH FEMALE LIBERATION? Everything! We cannot be liberated exclusive of a total social revolution. It was very important for us to develop a woman's consciousness and transform the consciousness of the revolutionary movements. Now we must not stop. We are talking about the taking of power, not just saying our piece, aren't we? Women must be in the heart and front of the armed struggle. Otherwise it probably won't develop and to the extent that it does it will be riddled with "fun and games."

Some might ask if armed struggle is not a "male thing." If that is so, what is the female alternative to taking power? There are not many ways to take power and gain liberation. In every revolutionary struggle women have been the strength and even the base; the problem has been the suppression of female consciousness and female leadership. We must see to it that the same does not happen here, for more than any place in the world male domination in North American struggle would be catastrophic.

The revolutionary units I describe could be all female or mixed. It is difficult for men to do this kind of work. There is no room for heavy ideology and ego-tripping; it is out of place and turns sour in a survival situation. However, a lot of problems that exist between women and men in a "normal" day to day life diminish in the new situation. The lines of struggle are much clearer, and the necessity for change is absolute.

The degree to which we see to it that we women are participating and developing the revolutionary struggle is the degree to which the female perspective will be dominant in our struggle and in the future society. We must not withdraw from the struggle, now that we have gotten to the point of actually raising female consciousness. We must be a vanguard if we are, and not say we should be. Let us not stop though we may be tired and discouraged and confused. Let us build an army of women who will be so strong, so humane that no one will have to ever "give" us power, and we will not have to "demand" equal rights.

FUTURE SHOCK, Toffler,Alvin. Bantam Books $1.95

SCUM MANIFESTO,Solanis,Valerie. Olympia Press 95¢

DIALECTICS OF SEX, Firestone, Shulamith. Bantam Books $1.25

WE THE PEOPLE, Huberman, Leo. Monthly Review Press $3.95

BURY MY HEART AT WOUNDED KNEE, Brown, Dee. Bantam Books is coming out with the paperback edition this month. The original hardbound edition costs $10.95.

RICH AND SUPERRICH,Lundburgh. New American Library $1.95

WHO RULES AMERICA, Domhoff, G. William. $2.45

MINIMANUAL, Marighelli. Radical Education Project, P.O. Box 561-A Detroit, Mich. 48232 25¢

ELEPHANT POEM

Suppose you have an elephant
with 56 millimeter trunk
and say he's
tearing up the jungle
(say you think he's drunk
or crazy)
How're you going to bring that elephant down?
lion can't
bear could but don't want to
and the panther's too small for that job.

Then suppose you have an elephant
with million millimeter trunk
and his jungle is the whole green world?
(and drunk
and crazy)
you see the problem.
one more word
about elephants
No matter how hard they try
elephants cannot pick their noses
any more than bankers can hand out money
or police put away their pistols
or politicians get right with God.

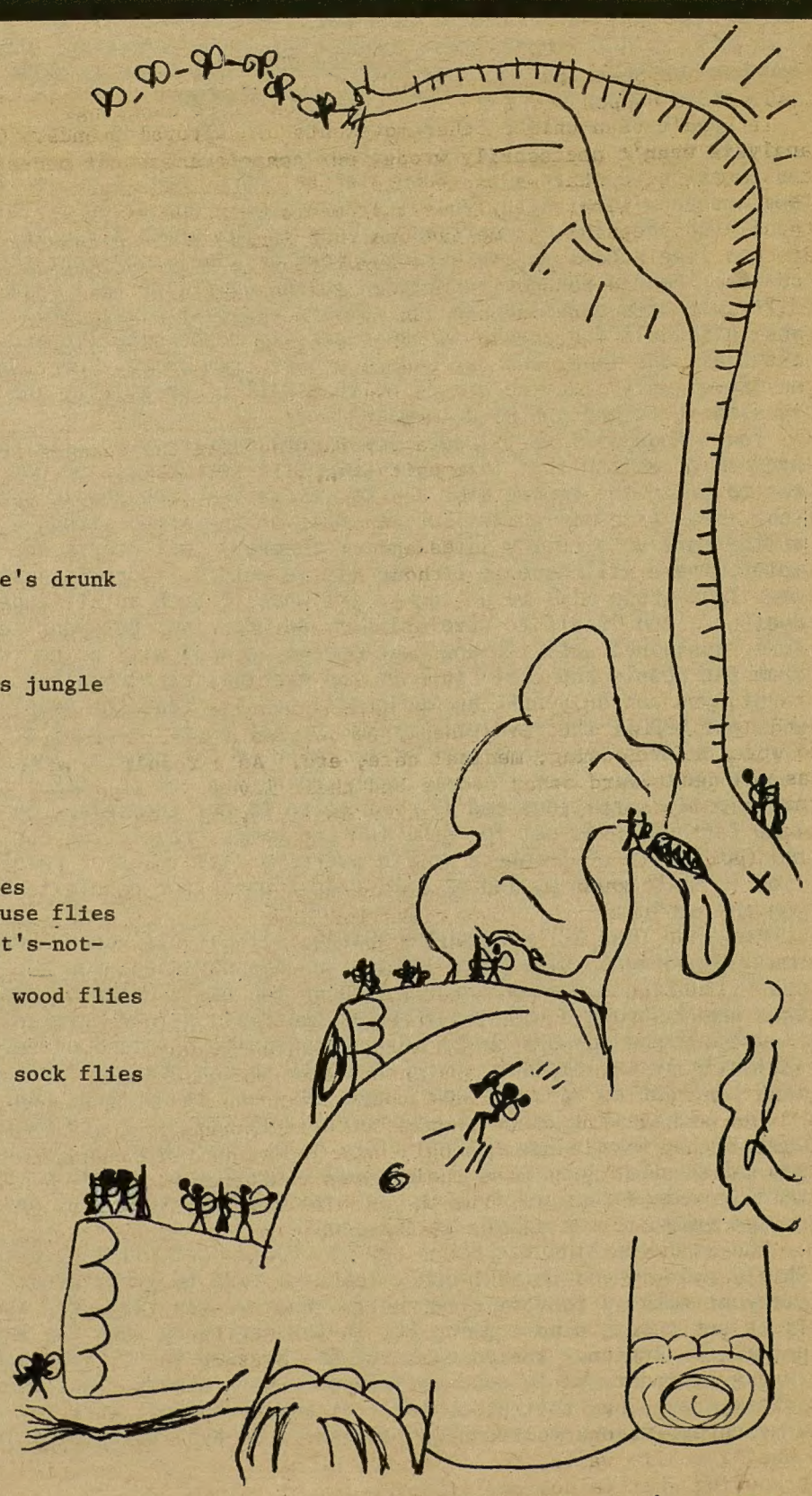
a sty
in the elephant's eye
aint nothing
but a fly in his nose
is a serious if not fatal condition
when the fly
gets into that nostril
it begins to swell
and stay closed
he cant smell cant drink cant think
cant get one up
on anybody
he begins to regret
all that flabby ammunition
hanging on him
he begins to wish
he'd been a little more bare-faced
like an ape or a fish
all those passageways
he needs to feed himself
tied up

ELEPHANT TURNED UPSIDE DOWN
by a fly
a million flies
outweigh a trunk
a tank
a bank
a million flies
outthink a pile of IBM
junk

we must be wise
to the elephant's lies
you may think we should try
to sober him up
but the trouble isn't that he's drunk
the trouble is
that he's an elephant
with multi-millimeter trunk
who believes the world is his jungle
and until he dies
he grows and grows

we must be flies
in the elephant's nose
ready to carry on
in every town
you know there are butterflies
there are horse flies and house flies
blue flies, shoo flies and it's-not-true flies
then there are may flies and wood flies
but I'm talking about
can flies & do flies
bottle flies, rock flies and sock flies
dragonflies and fireflies
in the elephant's nose
ready to carry on
til he goes down

by Judy Grahn



I think the numbness I feel politically is not due to the nature of armed struggle but due to the lack of any strategy. I think in some vauge way I saw the women's movement and the work I did in it as a process that would lead up to and define armed struggle. That didn't happen and I'm not the only one left dangling.

It hasn't been unlike other movements or cultural trends. Our analysis wasn't necessarily wrong, our consciousness not necessarily bad but we knew what we wanted and didn't know how to get it. I feel stranded with an analysis that makes this society/world totally unacceptable to me and one that includes the necessity of armed struggle to bring about a revolution as a given, but do not have any idea as to how I act upon such an analysis. What is the real power structure and how can it be seized. I'm amazed at my naivete about the structure of this society. It dawns on me that we talked more about who our enemy is and what we want in a post-revolutionary society much more than what it would take to win that society. When it became clear to me that Women's Liberation was not magically bringing on a revolution, that the changes it made in my own life (the community-the political subculture) were not permanent and couldn't be depended on, I retreated into my personal life of worrying about supporting myself, surviving, money in the bank, etc. The hassles and realities of my life, being gay, being basically alone without much money, for sanity's sake had to be divided somewhat from my political beliefs. Or maybe that's not it. Maybe my politics got narrowed down to wanting a revolution and I feel less concern for how people lead their personal lives. I really don't care if so and so is rich. I do care about that word becoming archaic someday when there will be nothing to compare it to - when free becomes a useless preface to words like housing, medical care, etc. As a result my attitude has changed toward other people and their lives. I also feel a growing compassion with the hassles of living in a capitalist sexist, racist country. I can't be hard on people for not leading pure (politcally speaking) lives.

But I don't know if I am speaking to your fears about armed struggle. I am afraid. The risks involved can't be taken very lightly. But I think the fears I have of being alone, of not being able to survive in this society - the everyday get by, make a buck, pay the rent, don't get sick hassles scare me more lately. That could be total bullshit since the everyday stuff is a reality to me and armed struggle still much of an abstraction.

I'm not sure how much class enters into someone's view of armed struggle. It's clear that there is no answer to the oppression of lower and working class people but armed struggle just as it is clear that middle class people have individual and class options within this society to make their lives comfortable. That doesn't mean that many of us not from the middle class don't choose to live uncomfortable lives (or at least try to stay alive) rather than risk them in battle.

More and more I find it hard to say am a revolutionary.

More and more I find it hard to say I am a revolutionary. It seems significant to me that I am a person who wants a social/economic revolution. There seems to be a difference. I live in an unrevolutionary place and must survive there and the reality of my desire to change that place doesn't negate the reality of me and my unrevolutionary life now. I'm not sure that makes sense.

What I really wanted to say again is that I'm more terrified of not knowing what to do than of doing it. I think.

During the last meeting of AIAW I realized that I hadn't written anything for the paper since mid summer that was from my heart or my soul. It could be partly, as the "No More Fun And Games" article says, that the women's movement is dead or dying. I wouldn't say dead--I would say at a loss as to what direction to move in. There are many sincere women who have come to consciousness through the women's movement--realized their own oppression as women and that of Third World and poor people because of capitalism and realized that revolution is the only solution. It is this last thing--revolution--that is slowing me up. After early consciousness raising, feeling the solidarity of straight women with me, a gay woman, after working together, learning to get angry, learning to be tough and like myself that way, after beginning AIAW, putting so much into it and feeling we were doing something to further the struggle, after beginning to deal with class chauvinism and racism, being stymied by being middle class and my own oppressiveness but somehow continuing to work, after Fred Hampton's death, Angela Davis' capture, George Jackson's murder and after Attica. After all these things I saw that what it came down to was revolution and armed struggle. And that ain't pretty.

I think the numbness I feel politically is due to the sobering realization of the nature of armed struggle. That my courage has not quite caught up with my political conviction.

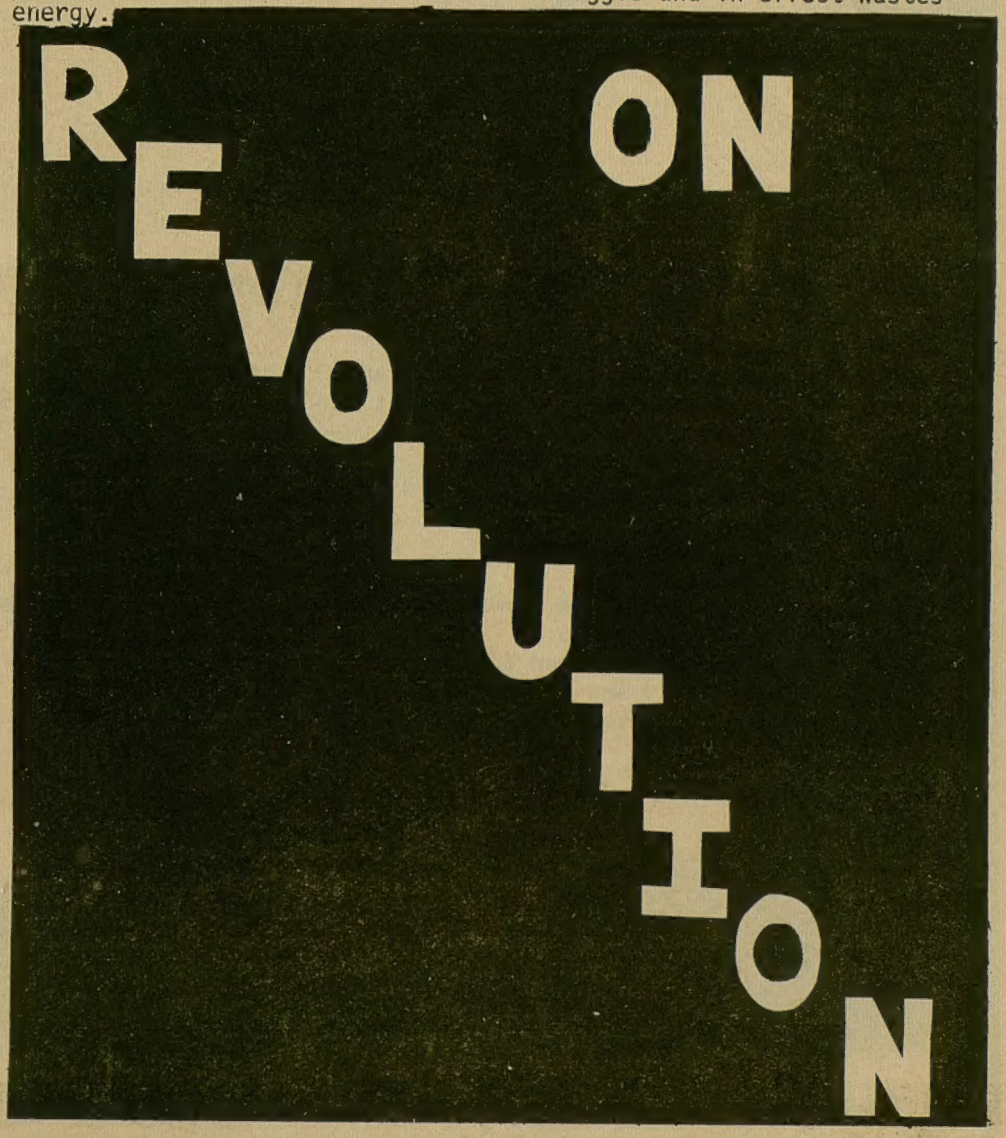
If this sounds middle class it is because I am from middle class. I have not had to daily fight for my existence as some Third World and poor people have. I have had the option to <u>think</u> about courage and armed struggle, to consider them carefully and waste alot of time finding the <u>correct</u> political direction. Since this is the record of a middle class woman trying to come to grips with the realities of being a revolutionary, it will probably only speak to middle class women. Many poor people have known the necessity for armed struggle for along time.

Six months ago when someone would ask me why I was revolutionary, I answered as Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Danny the Red from Germany) did. That I was revolutionary because it is the best thing to be. But now I don't think it's the best thing to be at all. It is frightening and seems impossible. When I look into my future, I see no joyous victory, I see only years of tedious work, prison and death. I used to think this saying by a woman revolutionary was very beautiful: "If I return I shall kiss you. But if I fall along the way, I ask only that you do the same in the name of the revolution." It has a much different sense to me now that I don't see myself returning.

In the end, I suppose, it doesn't matter if being a revolutionary is the best tning to be or not. It is the only thing I can be and eventually I will find the courage.

I don't mean to sound totally pessimistic. There are some hopeful things going on in the women's movement--things that will help us find a direction. It's true that personal things are political, but I think we're realizing that it becomes politically unproductive for women to spend a lot of energy trying to make their personal lives right-on politically. I've seen straight women defensive about not being gay and going through inner hell because they aren't really comfortable with being gay even though they think it right politically and keep pushing themselves to change. Their defensiveness has real causes. When gay women here first brought up the issue of lesbianism, we demanded that straight women deal with it and the lesbian within them. I needed to do that then, because I needed to feel their support and acceptance. But now that I realize people change and deal with things as fast as they can under their present circumstances, I regret the effects of our demands.

What I'm hopeful about and see as a healthy and progressive tning for us here, is a change in attitude that separates the personal from the political in some ways. That we now seem to know that spending a lot of time in AIAW dealing with life-style or spending a lot of time worrying about the correctness of our personal lives does little to further the struggle and in effect wastes energy.



Toward the grove
wherein butterflies love
I'm putting my letter out.

And toward the hollow
of my lips
I draw that your fine mushroom.

Friend, wild gay friend,
at what age you have done
your first trip?

Close to me
near the pillow
beads of dew.

And a little friend
in the light of moon
reading a letter.

danielle g. culla

Poem, from a Spanish woman to Luisha

good woman loved me last night.
our bodies fit together fine.
we went all over the water bed.
i thought i was drowning three times
she pulled me out with her fingers
her tongue her gentle breasts
all around; our beauty. her
comfortable hips intoxicating. my thighs
her thighs frantically seeking. me,
at last,
introducing myself
without formalities.

As shadows embrace the corners of the sky,

We lie together.

Darkness floats like an essence into the room,

Touching our lips, our cheeks, with soft caress.

Our breaths mingle,

While the night draws about us

A cloak of soft, warm kitten fur.

I cradle your breasts in my hands

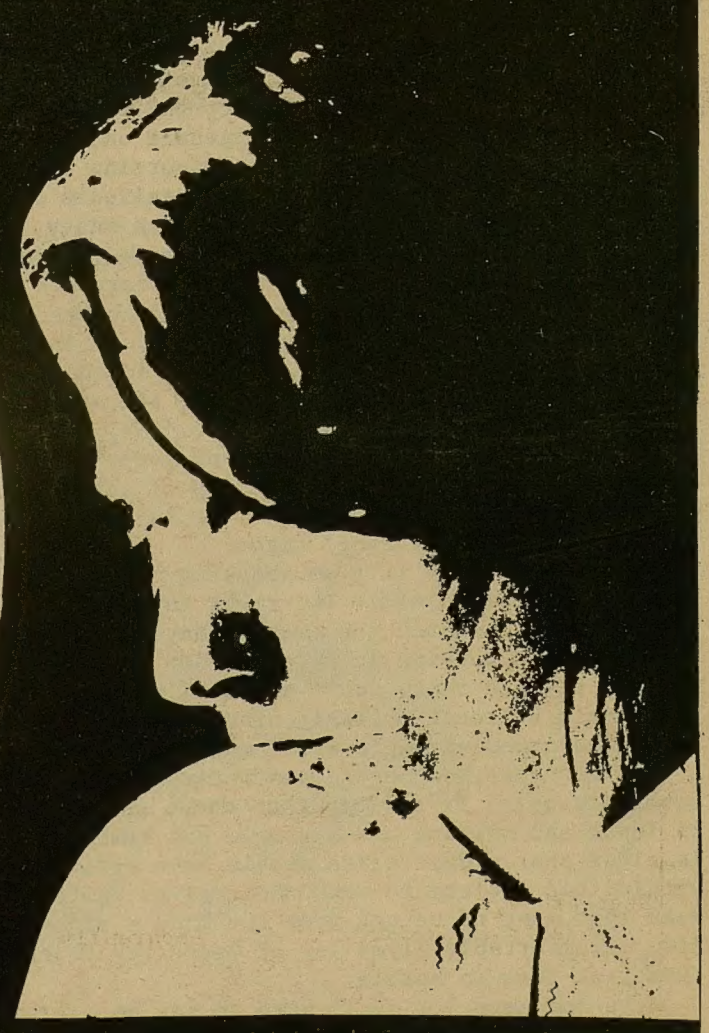
And your fingers trace a map of my back.

women together
loving
are sooooo
beautiful!
happy!
intense!
loud!
graceful!
funny!
intimate
strong
angry
so <u>together</u>
and I'm sick snotty sweaty tired
alone in my bed
lonely
listening to the giggles while I crash
-not without fantasies and expectations-
but raw crushed

from the pain
of deceptions
changes
revelations
feeling more than usually confused/angry/insane

and women together loving
women I love together
make me feel too much

I'm so afraid to risk more pain.



The column "Old Wive's Tails" is being sent to Ain't I A Woman? by the Los Angeles Self Help Clinic One.

Some Old * Wives' Tails.

Some Old Wives' Tails *
by
Self-Help Clinic One
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Jeanne

*Formerly known as "Old Wives' Tales". We enjoy printing our sisters' comments and questions for all sisters to share. If you want to contribute to "Some Old Wives' Tails" please write us in care of Self Help Clinic One, 1027 So. Crenshaw, Los Angeles, California 90019.

We believe that the expression "Old Wives' Tales" needs to be used once again with its former meaning intact; "Experienced women's knowledge".

We women have been systematically denied the knowledge to basic care of our bodies. We are forced to seek "professional" help from a male oriented and male dominated system instead of knowing what we can safely do for ourselves. We are tired of this rip off. It is time that we take back the control over our own bodies that we once had. Let's learn from one another and help our sisters, help ourselves.

Dear O.W.T.,
Everytime I get examined I am told that I am "tipped". The first time this happened I freaked out. I don't seem to feel any different but worry because no one has yet bothered to answer me. Is there something wrong? Can I get pregnant more easily? Or cancer?

In sisterhood,

Margie T., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Margie,
Would you believe that most of us are "tipped" one way or the other, and have been equally scared by physicians. Our observations tell us not to be concerned. The only time the angle of tip becomes important is when I.U.D.'s or other instruments are inserted into the uterus. Skilled hands greatly diminish any risks.

O.W.T.

Dear Old Wives' T's;
Every time I think about getting another pelvic examination, I wind up putting it off for another month. I have yet to find a gentle doctor and dread the examination almost as much as I dread sitting in the sterile white unfriendly waiting room. Other than a Pap test, my visit usually says everything is fine. And it is expensive to be told that-I'm fine. Why can't we have do it yourself Pap tests? I read somewhere that a doctor in Maryland developed such a kit about 7 or 8 years ago. Do you know what happened to the idea?

Arbie S., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Arbie,
We too have heard of it. Apparently it is still being used in various places, our digging uncovered. Canadian women, for one, and some "underdeveloped nations" for another-to name a few. We can only guess that it is being withheld from us for the same reasons we have never been encouraged to learn more about our bodies and have our own speculums. To be more specific;$$$$$$$$$$ out of you-know-who's pockets. Self Help Clinic One is trying, though, to get some sources for some answers.

O.W.T.

medical Bulletins

In the past several weeks, women from the Los Angeles Self Help Clinic have come under heavy criticism from several "leftist" newspapers. Both the Village Voice and the Guardian have printed articles attacking the L.A. women for everything from being unsafe to having an incorrect approach for dealing with inadequate medical care. In at least one case, the self help clinic was blatently misrepresented.... the accusation that the women were advocating cervical self-examination to replace Pap smears for cancer detection was not true.

Also, the women were charged with using incorrect tactics. It was suggested that women should be organizing around the health professions rather than on their own. On one hand, it may be helpful to have the knowledge and skill of some sympathetic professionals (no one is completely excluding that alternative). But we aren't going to have control of the medical institutions in this country until there's a revolution. Until that time, we can begin to look after ourselves as much as possible. That is exactly what the L.A. women and others are beginning to do.

The self help clinics are one of the most productive actions I've seen in the women's movement. Health care is a basic need of all people. Any skills and knowledge we can acquire in order to meet people's needs (especially at little or no cost to people who don't have the money) is valuable work. The attacks on the L.A. women were frightened, reactionary responses to women taking control of their own lives.

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The page numbers in the last issue of AIAW were messed up because we had some trouble getting the medical supplement printed. Sorry if it was confusing.

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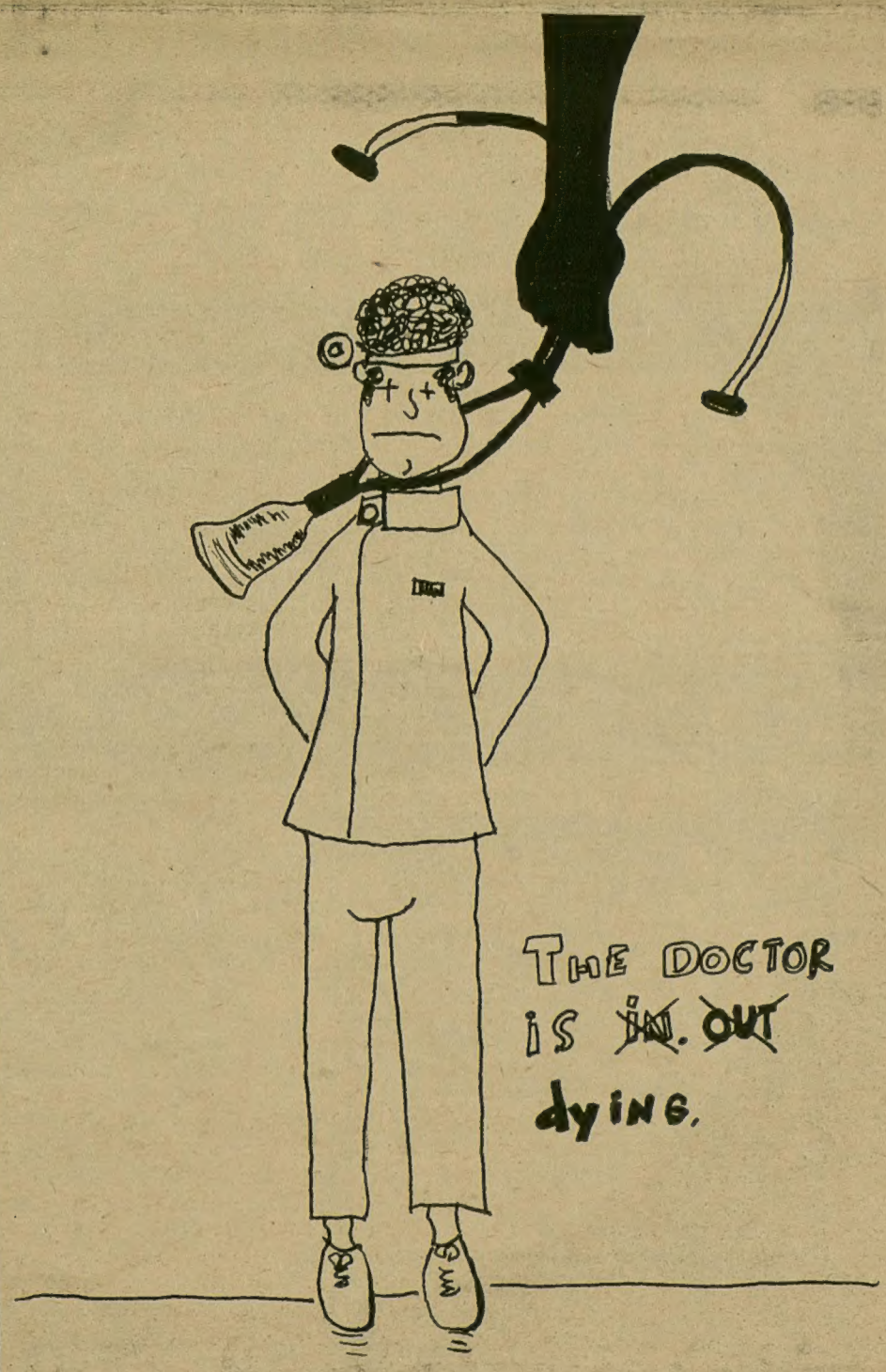
The AIAW collective wants to re-state the warning pertaining to the menstrual extraction article in the last issue of Ain't I A Woman? (Volume 2, Issue 4-Medical Supplement). Women should not attempt to improvise instruments to perform menstrual extraction on themselves or on other women. Using too much suction to extract the contents of the uterus or using as instrument that will not collapse upon touching the uterine wall are both potentially very dangerous. Although the process of period extraction is not difficult there is still some amount of knowledge and skill required before it should be attempted.

Hopefully, in the very near future, menstrual extraction will become more widely practiced, by doctors as well as by women paramedics. Until then, it is unwise to attempt doing menstrual extractions.



The man

over there says that women
need to be helped into carriages
and lifted over ditches, and to have
the best place everywhere.
Nobody ever helps me into
carriages or over puddles
or gives me
the best place...

and ain't I a woman?

Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and
gathered into barns, and no man could head me
...and ain't I a woman?
I could work as much and eat as much as a man
when I could get it—and bear the lash as well
...and ain't I a woman?
I have borne thirteen children, and seen most of em
sold into slavery, and when I cried out
with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me
...and ain't I a woman?

Sojourner Truth Abolitionist, 1851

AGC 71

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